

World Tourism Organization



# UNWTO

## **Visa facilitation:**

Stimulating economic growth  
and development through tourism

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Visa facilitation: Stimulating economic growth and development through tourism

Published by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

First printing: January 2013

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Citation: Visa facilitation: Stimulating economic growth and development through tourism

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# Visa facilitation: Stimulating economic growth and development through tourism<sup>1</sup>

## Summary

- In 2012, destinations around the world required on average two thirds of the world's population to obtain a visa prior to departure. On the other hand, some 18% of the world's population was able to enter a destination without a visa, while another 17% could receive a visa on arrival.
- Globally there is a big variety in Visa policies, from countries allowing almost any citizen to enter freely, to countries requesting visas indiscriminately.
- Overall, emerging economies tend to be more open than advanced ones.
- South-East Asian, East African and Caribbean destinations are among the most open.
- Central African and North American destinations are the most restrictive.
- Notable progress towards Visa facilitation has been made over recent years. While at the beginning of 2008, destinations requested from an average 77% of the world's population to apply for a traditional Visa prior to departure, this percentage was down to 63% by 2012.
- Many destinations showed remarkable and substantial improvements between 2010 and 2012. In total, improvements in visa requirements were made between 5,080 destination-source market country pairs.
- A total of 43 destinations significantly facilitated the visa process for citizens of 20 or more countries between 2010 and 2012, by changing their visa policies from "Visa required" to either "eVisa", "Visa on arrival" or "no Visa required".
- Destinations, when reviewing their visa policies, tended to thoroughly review and introduce changes.
- The most popular facilitation measure was the introduction of "Visa on arrival". Nearly 70% of all improvements noted comparing 2010 and 2012 data were from "Visa required" to "Visa on arrival".

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1. Paper prepared by Dirk Glaesser and John Kester with valuable input from Márcio Favilla, Sandra Carvão, Lorna Hartantyo, Birka Valentin, Lisa Fürbaß, Kate Holmes, Jacinta García and Alberto G. Uceda.

## Introduction: The dimensions of international tourism

Over the past six decades, tourism has experienced continued expansion and diversification, becoming one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. Many new destinations have emerged alongside the traditional ones of Europe and North America. In the period 1980-2011, international tourist arrivals (i.e. overnight visitors) more than tripled, from 279 million in 1980 to 996 million in 2011, corresponding to an average growth of 4.2% a year.

The export value of tourism – international tourism receipts, excluding international passenger transport – increased in the same period from US\$ 103 billion in 1980 to US\$ 1,041 billion in 2011. In real terms, this corresponds to an average growth of 4.1% a year, virtually the same pace as arrivals.

According to the UNWTO long-term forecast *Tourism Towards 2030*<sup>2</sup>, international tourist arrivals are expected to continue to grow at a sustained pace of 3.3% a year on average, rising to 1.8 billion by 2030. International tourist arrivals in emerging economy destinations of Asia, Latin America, Central and Eastern Europe, Eastern Mediterranean Europe, the Middle East and Africa will grow at double the pace (+4.4% a year) of advanced economy destinations (+2.2% a year). As a result, arrivals to emerging economies are expected to surpass those to advanced economies by 2015. In 2030, 57% of international arrivals will be in emerging economy destinations (versus 30% in 1980 and 47% in 2010) and 43% in advanced economy destinations (versus 70% in 1980 and 53% in 2010).

In order to fully reap the benefits international tourism can bring to an economy it is necessary to put in place conditions so that the country can be easily visited and make it attractive to develop and invest in the sector.

## The functions of Visas

Visa policies are among the most important governmental formalities influencing international tourism. The development of visa policies and procedures as well as important travel documents such as passports is closely linked with the development of tourism. With the fast growth of international tourism in the last six decades, the quality, reliability and functionality of visa and travel documents evolved as well. While only half a century ago travel was heavily impacted by customs regulations, currency exchange limitations and visa formalities, a lot of progress has been made which contributes to the remarkable growth of the tourism sector. Especially noteworthy are the multilateral agreements which mutually exempt all or certain categories of travellers from needing a visa. However, and despite the progress made, current visa policies are still regularly mentioned as inadequate and inefficient, and thus, an obstacle to tourism growth.

Visas are used for several functions, among them: to ensure security, to control immigration and limit the entry, duration of stay or activities of travellers, to generate revenue, apply measures of reciprocity, to ensure a destination's carrying capacity and control demand. While security is commonly stated to be the most important factor to impose a visa, in practice all the before-mentioned forms can be observed and form a reason to introduce or maintain a visa.

Travellers see visas mainly as a formality, which has a cost. If the cost for obtaining a visa, whether the direct monetary cost or the indirect cost, including distance, wait times and treatment, exceed a threshold, potential travellers are simply deterred from a journey or choose an alternative destination with less hassle. This is no new finding and it is interesting in that context to note that, already in 1963, the delegates of 87 States agreed at the United Nations Conference on International Travel and Tourism in Rome (Italy), that "Governments should extend to the maximum number of countries the practice of abolishing, through bilateral agreements or by unilateral decision, the requirement of entry visas for temporary visitors."<sup>3</sup>

2. World Tourism Organization (2011), *Tourism Towards 2030 / Global Overview*, UNWTO, Madrid.

3. See next page.

## Visa facilitation: areas of opportunity

Joint research by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) presented to the 4th T20 Ministers Meeting in May 2012 (Tourism Ministers of the G20) demonstrates that improving visa processes could generate an extra US\$ 206 billion in tourism receipts and create as many as 5.1 million additional jobs by 2015 in the G20 economies<sup>4</sup>.

The analysis also identified five important areas of opportunity for visa facilitation<sup>5</sup>:

### Improve delivery of information

Availability and reliability of the information destinations provide on entry formalities, especially visa requirements and procedures was among the simplest, but also least addressed, area of opportunity. This included also the availability of this information in multiple languages, especially that information of importance for the traveller.

### Facilitate current processes to obtain visas

A major area for improvement is in the way visa requests for temporary visitors are processed in general and the requirements linked to this process. Whether these are personal interviews, official documents or certificates, they usually produce at least temporarily bottlenecks, uncertainty and wait times. A better use of modern IT technology, service providers and the consideration of Visa on arrival are among the suitable techniques to improve those processes.

### Differentiated treatment to facilitate tourist travel

Widely used among States is the technique to facilitate the visa process for certain types of visitors, especially temporary visitors visiting for tourism purposes. This can range from means of transportation, e.g. cruise passengers allowed to disembark from the ship without a tourist visa or to arrive by charter planes, to specified geographical areas or port of entries.

### Institute eVisa programmes

Currently the most widely discussed opportunity is the use of eVisa. If exempting from entry visa cannot be avoided, eVisa is the option preferred to paper Visa. It can be more easily obtained and requires neither the physical presence of the applicant nor the presence of the passport, which is especially important for destinations without a widespread network of embassies and consulates.

### Establish regional agreements

There are already a number of regional agreements in place which allow travellers from a non-member country to move freely between member countries once admitted by one of the participating countries. For citizens of one of the Member States of some regions it is even possible to travel without passport by simply using a valid national document of identification.

As a result of this work, the G20 Leaders recognized, at its June 2012 Summit, the role of tourism as “a vehicle for job creation, economic growth and development” and furthermore committed to “work towards developing travel facilitation initiatives in support of job creation, quality work, poverty reduction and global growth.” (G20 Declaration - June 2012)

3. States represented at the conference were: Afghanistan, Algeria, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Bulgaria, Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Ceylon, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo (Leopold-Ville), Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Federal Republic of Germany, Finland, France, Greece, Guatemala, Holy See, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Mali; Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Republic of South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, United Arab Republic, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Venezuela, Yugoslavia. UN Specialized Agencies: FAO, UNESCO, ICAO, WHO, IMCO.

4. UNWTO/WTTC, The Impact of Visa Policies on Job Creation in the G20 Economies, 2012

5. The following is referring to entry visa.

# The global and regional dimensions

In spite of many recent strides, visa requirements still affect global tourism significantly. In 2012, destinations around the world requested on average from 63% of the world's population that they obtain a visa before initiating their international journey. Another 2% of the population was at least allowed to apply for an eVisa<sup>6</sup>, while 16% would be able to apply for a Visa on arrival. Only 18% of the world's population would not require a Visa at all when travelling for tourism purposes.

## Sub-regions of destinations by percentage of world population affected by visa policies, 2012

	Openness <sup>1</sup>	No Visa	Visa on arrival	eVisa	Visa required <sup>2</sup>
	% of world population affected by visa policies				
<b>World</b>	31	18%	16%	2%	63%
Advanced economies <sup>3</sup>	26	24%	0.4%	2%	73%
Emerging economies <sup>3</sup>	32	17%	21%	2%	61%
<b>By UNWTO regions:</b>					
<i>Africa</i>	29	8%	29%	0%	62%
North Africa	16	15%	1%	0%	84%
West Africa	23	7%	22%	0%	71%
Central Africa	6	2%	7%	0%	92%
East Africa	49	6%	62%	0%	33%
Southern Africa	29	29%	0%	0%	71%
<i>Americas</i>	37	31%	8%	1%	60%
North America	14	11%	0%	5%	84%
Caribbean	45	39%	8%	0%	53%
Central America	37	30%	10%	0%	60%
South America	35	29%	9%	0%	62%
<i>Asia and the Pacific</i>	37	20%	19%	7%	54%
North-East Asia	27	25%	2%	0%	73%
South-East Asia	51	23%	35%	8%	35%
Oceania	41	27%	16%	6%	51%
South Asia	24	4%	20%	11%	65%
<i>Europe</i>	26	21%	6%	0%	72%
Northern Europe	26	26%	0%	0%	74%
Western Europe	23	23%	0%	0%	77%
Central/Eastern Europe	26	16%	14%	0%	70%
Southern/Mediterranean Europe	27	26%	1%	0%	73%
- of which EU-27	24	24%	0%	0%	76%
<i>Middle East</i>	20	1%	20%	10%	70%

 5% points above world average  
 5% points below world average

Source: compiled by UNWTO based on information of national official institutions

1. The higher the score, the better. Openness indicates to what extent a destination is facilitating tourism. It is calculated by summing the percentage of the world population exempt from obtaining a Visa, with the percentages of Visa on arrival weighted by 0.7 and eVisa by 0.5.

For the (sub)regional totals, the percentages of the four different visa categories and the resulting openness score represent the averages of countries in that group (where countries are weighted by the natural logarithm of the population size in order to take account of differences in destination size).

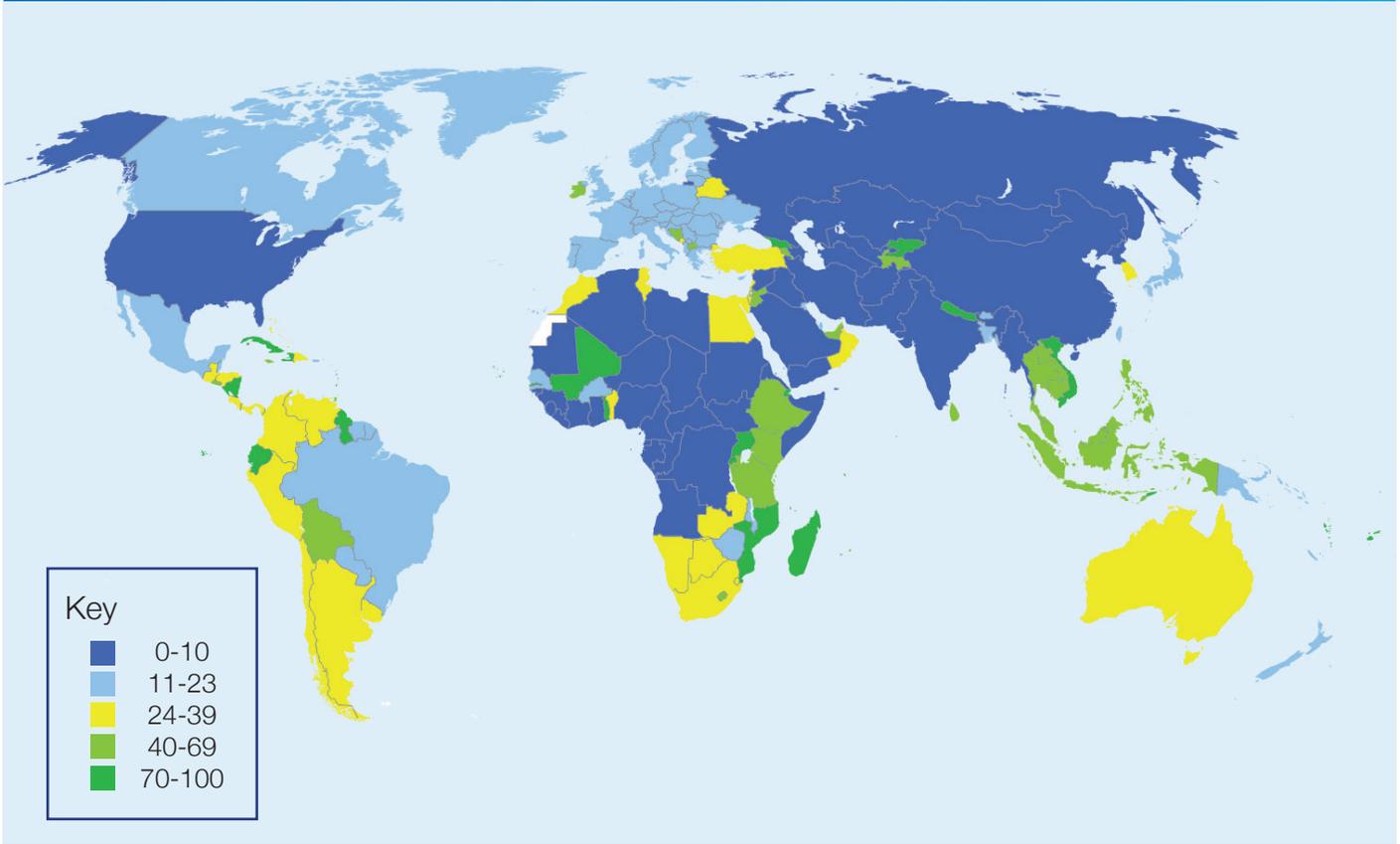
2. Visa required: Visa has to be obtained prior to departure and is not an electronic Visa.

3. Classification based on the International Monetary Fund (IMF), see the Statistical Annex of the IMF World Economic Outlook of April 2012, page 177, at [www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/01](http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2012/01). Destination countries weighted by  $\ln(1000 \text{ population})$

Note: Due to rounding the sum of the separate figures may not be 100%.

6. eVisa were separately accounted for in 2012 for the first time in this analysis. In 2008 and 2010, eVisa and Visa on arrival belonged to the same category.

## Openness Visa Facilitation



Source: compiled by UNWTO based on information of national official institutions

The higher the score, the better. Openness indicates to what extent a destination is facilitating tourism. It is calculated by summing the percentage of the world population exempt from obtaining a Visa, with the percentages of Visa on arrival weighted by 0.7 and eVisa by 0.5.

Source: compiled by UNWTO based on information of national official institutions

Disclaimer: The maps elaborated by UNWTO are for reference only and do not imply any judgment on the legal status of any territory, or any endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.

Emerging economies are overall more open than advanced ones<sup>7</sup>. When travelling to an emerging economy destination on average 61% of the world population needs a traditional Visa and 2% an eVisa, while for advanced economy destinations 73% need a traditional Visa and 2% an eVisa. However, full exemption from a visa is more common in advanced economies (24% vs. 17%), whereas in emerging economies Visa on arrival is much more common (21% vs. 0.4%).

**From a regional perspective, destinations in Asia and the Pacific have facilitated international travel most.** 20% of the world's population does not require a Visa, 19% could obtain a Visa on arrival and 7% an eVisa.

South-East Asia is the most open sub-region because of the large number of Visa on arrival (35% of world's population on average) and a considerable number of Visa exemptions (23%) and eVisa (8%).

When travelling to the Americas, 60% of the world's population is required to obtain a traditional Visa prior to departure. However, this figure varies widely across the sub-regions of the Americas. While North America is one of the most restricted sub-regions, where only 11% of the world's population can enter without a Visa<sup>8</sup>, the Caribbean is the third most open sub-region in the world with 39% Visa exemptions and 8% Visa on arrival. Also the two other sub-regions, Central and South America

7. Weighting Visa not required 1, Visa on Arrival 0.7, eVisa 0.5. Data for regions and sub-regions are average data and might not fully reflect the situation for all countries, especially in less homogenous subregions as Africa, South Asia and Central and Eastern Europe.

8. Although not all eVisa programmes are technically classified as visas (for example ESTA in the USA is not a visa according to law), they are similar in form and function and have been therefore accounted for as eVisa.

abolished Visas and make the Americas the leading region in having abolished this travel formality (31%).

Africa requires a Visa prior to departure from 62% of the world's population, but has at the same time the highest percentage for Visa on arrival (29%). However, this figure varies significantly across the African sub-regions. In Central Africa, the use of traditional Visa is highest of all sub-regions (92%), East Africa is the lowest in the world (33%). Visa on arrival is popular in East Africa (62%), making East Africa the second most open sub-region in the world.

In the Middle East, 70% of the world's population is required to obtain a traditional Visa prior to departure to any of its destinations, but 20% are allowed to obtain a Visa on arrival and 10% to use eVisa. Interestingly, the Middle East has the highest percentage of the world's population subject to eVisa among all five regions analyzed. But at the same time, the abolishment of any Visa is, with only 1% of the population not required to obtain a Visa, the lowest among all five regions.

**European destinations are among the more restrictive**, requiring 72% of the world's population to obtain a Visa before departure, while 21% was not required to obtain a Visa and 6% could obtain it on arrival. All four European sub-regions show more or less comparable patterns.

Analyzing the importance of the different measures, we find that:

- Visa exemption is most common in the Caribbean (39%) and Central America (30%);
- Visa on arrival is comparatively common in East Africa

(62%) and South-East Asia (35%);

- eVisa is in particular popular in South Asia (11%) and Middle East (10%).
- Traditional Visas are most prevalent in Central Africa (92%), North America and North Africa (both 84%), followed by North-East Asia, the four European sub-regions and the Middle East (all 70% or higher).

Least restrictive destinations		
	Name of Destination	Openness[1]
1	Cook Islands	100
	Dominica	100
	Micronesia	100
	Niue	100
	Tuvalu	100
6	Haiti	99
7	Macao (China)	84
8	Hong Kong (China)	80
9	Nicaragua	79
	Turks & Caicos Islands	79
	Fiji	79
12	Georgia	78
13	Guyana	76
	St Vincent & Grenadines	76
15	Vanuatu	75
16	Kyrgyzstan	74
	Gambia	74
	Vietnam	74
19	Rwanda	73
20	Mali	72
21	Cape Verde	71
	Nepal	71
	Togo	71
	Uganda	71
	Mozambique	71

Source: compiled by UNWTO based on information of national official institutions

[1] Openness indicates to what extent a destination is facilitating tourism. It is calculated by summing the percentage of the world population exempt from obtaining a Visa, with the percentages of Visa on arrival weighted by 0.7 and eVisa by 0.5.

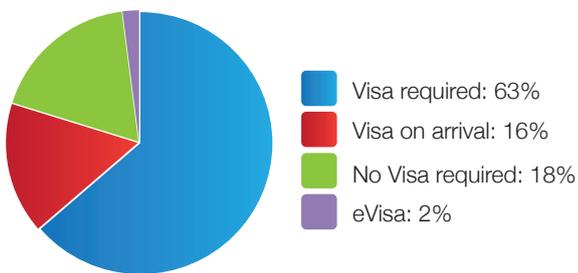
7. Although not all eVisa programmes are technically classified as visas (for example ESTA in the USA is not a visa according to law), they are similar in form and function and have been therefore accounted for as eVisa.

8. Weighting Visa not required 1, Visa on Arrival 0.7, eVisa 0.5. Data for regions and sub-regions are average data and might not fully reflect the situation for all countries, especially in less homogenous subregions as Africa, South Asia and Central and Eastern Europe.

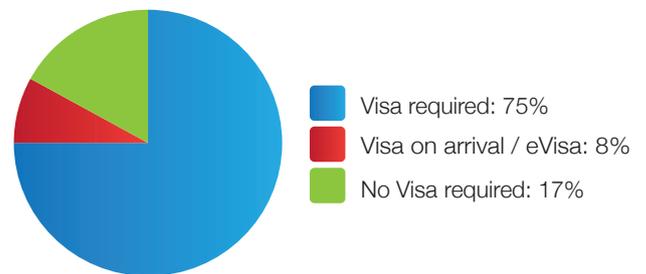
## Progress in recent years

Looking into the evolution of Visa formalities in recent years, data shows that there is a recent and strong tendency of improvement. While at the beginning of 2008, destinations around the world required on average 77% of the world's population to obtain a traditional Visa before travel, this percentage went down to 74% in 2010, and further down to 63% in 2012.

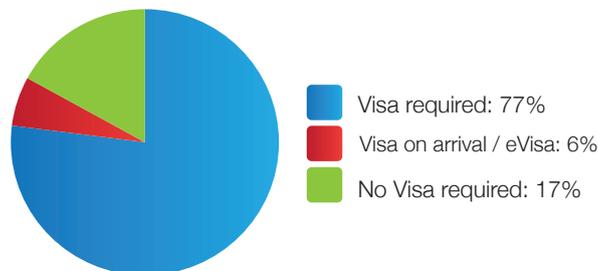
**2012 - World Population affected by Visa Policies**



**2010 - World Population affected by Visa Policies**



**2008 - World Population affected by Visa Policies**



Source: compiled by UNWTO based on information of national official institutions

The reason for this remarkable and substantial improvement between 2010 and 2012 was determined action by governments. In total, improvements in visa requirements were noted for 5,080 destination-source market pairs comparing 2010 and 2012 data. Destinations facilitated citizens of another country the Visa formality by either simply abolishing Visa, or allowing Visa to be obtained on arrival or in electronic form, i.e. eVisa. A total of 43 destinations facilitated significantly the visa policies for citizens of 20 or more countries by changing their visa policies from “Visa required” to either “eVisa”, “Visa on arrival” or “no Visa required”. The 43 destinations introduced altogether 5,044 individual measures and contributed the major part to the 5,080 improvements which were introduced in total by all destinations between 2010 and 2012. This demonstrates that destinations, when reviewing their visa policies tended to thoroughly review and introduce changes.

Analyzing all facilitation techniques, the most common change was from “Visa required” to “Visa on arrival”, representing nearly 70% of all changes. Although eVisa and similar measures were introduced, their importance was still minor in comparison to the other facilitation measures.

### Destinations which improved Visa procedures for 20 or more countries of origin (2010-2012)

	Destination	Number of improvements <sup>9</sup>
1	Micronesia	194
2	Niue	194
3	Palau	194
4	São Tomé e Príncipe	194
5	Tuvalu	194
6	Djibouti	192
7	Haiti	190
8	Mozambique	189
9	Rwanda	181
10	Burundi	179
11	Togo	179
12	Cape Verde	178
13	Mali	172
14	Kyrgyzstan	166
15	Uganda	161
16	Guyana	157
17	United Arab Emirates	150
18	Laos	144
19	Kenya	138
20	Ecuador	126
21	Tanzania	126
22	Armenia	123
23	Bolivia	121
24	Macao (SAR)	120
25	Gambia	115
26	Sri Lanka	114
27	Georgia	112
28	Nicaragua	109
29	Tajikistan	77
30	Bangladesh	55
31	Bonaire	54
32	Cayman Islands	51
33	Zambia	50
34	French Polynesia	49
35	St Lucia	44
36	St Kitts & Nevis	39
37	Nauru	37
38	Burkina Faso	36
39	Ethiopia	35
40	New Caledonia	33
41	Trinidad & Tobago	26
42	Australia	24
43	Senegal	22
	Subtotal	5044
	Other destinations	36
	<b>Total</b>	<b>5080</b>

## Outlook

In 1963, the United Nations Conference on International Travel and Tourism in Rome stressed the dependency of tourism development on the actions of governments, especially the facilitation of governmental formalities for international travel. 50 years later, the UNWTO/World Travel Market Ministers' Summit in London concluded in November 2012 that visa processes and policies still present major barriers to travel and tourism, recalling that restrictive visa-issuance policies and complicated entry formalities are still stifling tourism growth, particularly from emerging economies which are also some of the fastest growing source markets for tourism.

However, it is also evident that the link between visa facilitation and economic growth through tourism is increasingly recognized by national authorities which have accompanied such recognition with concrete facilitation measures. Furthermore, the clear tendency of easing visa procedures observed during the period 2010-2012, as shown in this paper, is likely to continue as the current discussions show.

UNWTO will continue to promote and advocate the importance of visa facilitation to support economic growth and development through tourism. The 94th session of the UNWTO Executive Council (October 2012) requested the Organization to make visa facilitation a priority area in its Programme of Work and, in cooperation with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and other partners, to continue providing case studies as well as benchmarking information to support this process and better understand the progress made.



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